

Independence Day Readings

Deuteronomy 10:17-21; Hebrews 11:8-16; Psalm 145:1-9; Matthew 5:43-48

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free. Luke 4:18

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:23-24,43-48



As we move into what it might mean for us as individuals, and as a nation to address systemic change to feed the hungry, shelter the poor, heal the sick and free those who are oppressed, here and around the world, we can be overwhelmed—especially when we hear words like “be perfect.” Our popular way of understanding perfect is not what Jesus desired. Perhaps, I would suggest, it is not what the world needs.

When our idea of “perfect” is to be always correct, not in need of redirection, without flaw, we will stumble. “*Telos*” in Greek means mature, aiming toward, or intended goal. Jesus is asking us not be without error, but to be persistent, to continue to strive, to be mature in the place we are on the journey. Are we young—we need to strive, keep our eyes on Jesus, listen forgive and be forgiven. Are we old—we need to strive, to persist in the call of Jesus to love God’s people, to listen, to be forgiven and to forgive as we move toward that goal of God’s household here on earth, in our midst. Change is part of our living, transformation moves us to see more of what God see and opens our hearts to the needs of each other and the world. And in our time, in this time, the world is very big, the needs very great. The pandemic, the cries for justice, the unrest, have made us realize we are all human and vulnerable. The upheaval at the time of the Revolution was unique to their time, but it happened because the people came together in spite of their differences

May we strive to have a vision of what we need in our time and persist, or persevere in our walk with Christ, even when it is hard.



Susan

Changing Sides

Richard Rohr

God chose things the world considers foolish to shame those who think they are wise. And God chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. —1 Corinthians 1:27

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun to rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. —Matthew 5:43-45

Christianity is a bit embarrassed by the powerless one, Jesus. We’ve made his obvious defeat into a glorious victory. Let’s face it, we feel more comfortable with power than with powerlessness and poverty. Who wants to be like Jesus on the cross? It just doesn’t look like a way of influence, a way of access, a way that’s going to make any difference in the world.

We worship this naked, homeless, bleeding loser, crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem, but we want to be winners . . . at least until we learn to love the so-called little, poor people—and then we often see they are not little at all, but better images of the soul. Yes, those with mental and physical disabilities, minority groups, LGBTQIA folks, refugees, prisoners, those with addictions, those without financial wealth—all who have “failed” in our social or economic success system—can be our best teachers in the ways of the Gospel. They represent what we are most afraid of and what we most deny within ourselves. That’s why we must learn to love what first seems like our “enemy.”

If we look at all the wars of history, we’ll see that God has unwittingly been enlisted on both sides of the fight. It’s easy to wonder what God does when both sides are praying for God’s protection. Trusting Jesus as the archetypal pattern of God’s presence and participation on Earth, I believe *God is found wherever the suffering is*. I believe this because that is precisely where Jesus goes. He makes heroes of the outsiders and underdogs in almost all his parables and stories. To miss that point is culpable and chosen ignorance. The awakened and aware ones—like Jesus and Francis of Assisi—go where people are suffering, excluded, expelled, marginalized, and abused. And there they find God.

Imagine, brothers and sisters, how different Western history and religion could have been if we had walked as tenderly and lovingly upon the earth as Francis and Jesus did. Imagine what the world would be like if we treated others with inherent and equal dignity and respect, seeing the divine DNA in ourselves and everyone else too—regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, appearance, or social class. Nothing less offers the world any lasting future. We must be honest about that—and rather quickly, I think.

Center for Action and Contemplation

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References:

Adapted from [Richard Rohr: *Essential Teachings on Love*](#), eds. Joelle Chase and Judy Traeger (Orbis Books: 2018), 180; and

The Art of Letting Go: Living the Wisdom of St. Francis, disc 2 (Sounds True: 2010), [CD](#).